

The Washington Post

AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

part 73 A Bad Soviet-American Agreement

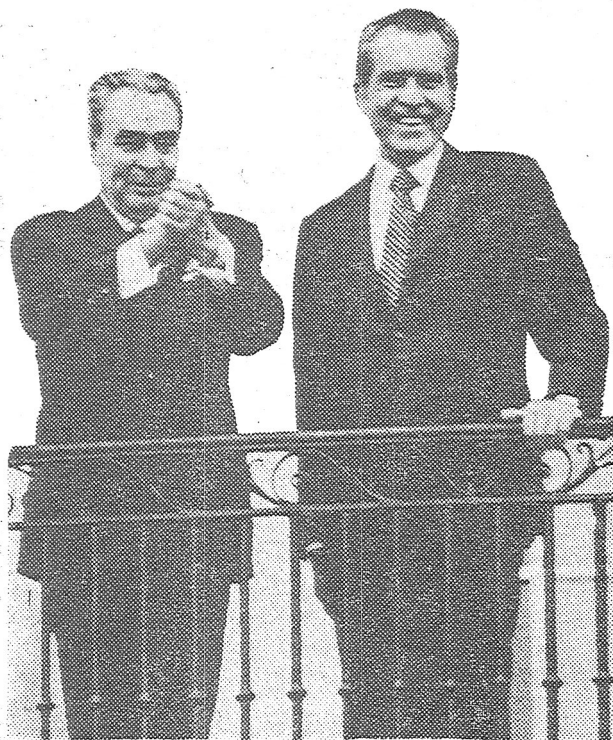
It was, we believe, a serious error for President Nixon to put the imprimatur of his office, his presence and his personal word on the agreement on "contacts, exchanges and cooperation" signed yesterday with the Soviet Union. The other three accords signed, on agriculture, transportation and oceanography, are of the useful functional sort which do not actually need a summit blessing but which do not suffer from one either. The agreement on what is called "cultural exchange" is something very different, involving not technological and economic interests which Americans and Soviets share but fundamental values which they do not share at all. That Mr. Nixon, in his eagerness to carry off a successful summit with Mr. Brezhnev, should act in a way to sweep aside those differences is a matter for deep regret.

Consider that in the Soviet Union, a great writer, Solzhenitsyn, is hounded and banned. A musician of international stature like Rostropovich is, as we noted in an editorial last November, "humiliated and caged

by his government for his long and honorable record of standing up for human rights." Others of lesser eminence but no less courage are shunted into insane asylums for saying an honest word. Many experts feel that the more the Soviet Union loosens up its political and economic relations with the West, the more it tightens the cultural screws at home. In what limited and tightly controlled contacts it has permitted with the United States, the Soviet government has consistently tried to resist American efforts to broaden and liberalize genuine cultural exchanges. For instance, the basement of the American Embassy in Moscow is full of copies of the popular exchange magazine, *Amerika*, which Soviet authorities refuse to have distributed. American radio broadcasts continue to be jammed, even while Mr. Brezhnev is in Washington with Mr. Nixon toasting the new agreement on "contacts, exchanges and cooperation."

Given these harsh facts, what was called for at this summit was, at the least, continuation of the modest but valuable exchange programs of the last 15 years or, at best, a candid statement by Mr. Nixon of his intention to make American participation in the exchanges more reflective of American values than of Soviet controls. Instead, Mr. Nixon presided personally over the new agreement as though there were no hitch to it at all. Not only that: by extending the agreement from two to 6½ years, he relinquished some of the all-too-small bargaining leverage with which Americans had protected the substance of the exchanges. This extension was justified by the two sides on the basis of the "Basic Principles of Relations" which Mr. Nixon and Mr. Brezhnev signed in Moscow a year ago. In fact, it has the effect of adding legitimacy to Soviet cultural controls and of letting the Kremlin pass off its regimented culture as the genuine Western article.

The ninth of those "Basic Principles" committed the signatories "to deepen cultural ties with one another and to encourage fuller familiarization with each other's cultural values." Surely this "Principle" does not require the President of the United States to facilitate and sanctify Soviet practices which are anathema to a free people. If that is what Mr. Nixon means to extoll in the name of "detente" and a "generation of peace," he risks giving a bad name to what is an otherwise welcome accommodation between two great powers with a common interest in coming to terms in certain hard-headed and mutually beneficial ways.



Soviet leader Brezhnev and President Nixon